

Yorks lead Veteran County Champs

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County Championships Veterans Premier Division

Yorkshire Veterans sit proudly at the top of the Veterans Premier Division on five points after three matches at the end of the first round of fixtures played at Cippenham.

Leicestershire and Cheshire are just behind on four points but, perhaps crucially, the white rose county have already played both their nearest rivals.

The late withdrawal of Cleveland meant a lop-sided first weekend with some counties playing three matches and some two but it did see Yorkshire play Gloucestershire, Kent face Leicestershire and Sussex meet Cheshire.

Yorkshire beat newcomers Gloucestershire 7-3 and it was skipper Janet Adams who starred for her adopted county as she won all her three matches, beating Christine Williams in the singles 3-0 (11-2 11-6 11-5) and partnering Richard Lightowler to a mixed doubles win over Williams and David Adamson 3-0 (11-7 11-4 11-9). She also joined Chris Clinton in the final mixed victory 3-1 (11-13 11-4 11-4 12-10) against William and Darren Griffin.

With new no 1 Clinton, Lightowler and Simon Pugh each picking up one win and Lightowler and Pugh easing to a men's doubles win 3-0 (11-5 11-8 11-3) over Griffin and Harvey it proved a solid start for former champions Yorkshire.

Another former champion, Leicestershire, had a fine start with a hard fought 6-4 win against Kent after moving from four-all to win the final two ends. Skipper Chris Rogers and his sister Karen Smith were to be thanked for their victory as Rogers took both his singles and partnered his sister to a mixed doubles win over Phil Cox and Marianne Jorgensen 3-0 (11-6 11-7 11-6).

Karen Smith beat Jorgensen in a thrilling five-game ladies singles 3-2 (11-5, 11-8, 7-11, 10-12, 11-5) and partnered Dave Gannon to another mixed win when they completed the victory for Leicestershire as they beat John Burleton 3-2 (11-5, 11-9, 8-11, 9-11, 11-3) in the final set.

The final match of the first round of fixtures saw Cheshire record a shock 6-4 victory against reigning champions Sussex. No 1 Brian Johns was in fine form, winning both his singles games; 3-2 (11-8, 11-8, 3-11, 12-14, 13-11) over Nigel Eckersley and 3-1 (11-9, 7-11, 13-11, 11-6) against fellow no 1 Ritchie Venner, which gave Cheshire a 5-4 lead with one match to play.

The final set saw Johns in action once again as he partnered Sue Collier, who was undefeated up to that point, in the final mixed doubles as they faced Eckersley and Rose Rainton. It was the former pair who triumphed in a five game thriller 3-2 (11-6, 7-11, 11-8, 6-11, 11-8) to give Cheshire the win.

Saturday afternoon saw Yorkshire establish a lead as they beat Cheshire by the narrowest of margins whilst Gloucestershire beat Lancashire 6-4 and Leicestershire drew with Sussex.

On this occasion Yorkshire no 1 Clinton proved a catalyst for his team as he produced a match winning performance by taking both his singles and partnered Adams to a mixed doubles win over Collier and Johns 3-1 (11-9, 11-9, 2-11, 11-9).

Clinton was made to work hard in his singles as he beat off a spirited challenge from Mark Evans 3-1 (10-12, 11-9, 11-2, 11-4) and then opposing no 1 Johns 3-2 (9-11, 11-8, 11-8, 6-11, 11-9) to complete victory for Yorkshire.

Gloucestershire recorded a surprise victory over Lancashire in which Keith Williams was unable to open his account in singles play as he was beaten 2-3 (8-11, 11-7, 11-9, 10-12, 5-11) by Dave Harvey and, in the battle of the number one players, he was beaten by Darren Griffin 3-2 (6-11, 11-6, 5-11, 13-11 13-11).

It was a fine all-round effort by Gloucestershire and victory was completed with a last set mixed doubles win which saw Griffin and Williams comfortably beat Phil Bowen and Brenda Buoey 3-0 (11-8, 12-10, 11-6) as Gloucestershire sealed the win.

The final match of the round saw a thrilling draw between the winners of the last two campaigns, Leicestershire and Sussex. It turned out to be a great team effort from Leicestershire who had to dig deep as no 1 Chris Rogers failed to win in singles play.

Star of the match for the Midlands was Karen Smith who picked up three wins. After she had partnered Rogers to a mixed doubles win over Peter Bartram and Rose Rainton, she was involved in an epic encounter with Rainton in the ladies singles where she came from 2-0 behind to win 3-2 (9-11, 3-11, 11-7, 11-6, 11-9).

A final set mixed doubles win was the match saver for Leicestershire as Smith and Dave Gannon beat Nigel Eckersley and Rainton 3-1 (12-10, 4-11, 11-6, 11-5) to complete the match with a share of the spoils for both teams.

Sunday morning saw Lancashire continue their disappointing start with a 6-4 defeat by local rivals Cheshire, while reigning champions Sussex took their first victory with a 7-3 victory over Kent. The top two teams in this division over the last decade, Yorkshire and Lancashire, fought out a thrilling draw.

Brian Johns was the man of the match in the battle of the two counties from the North West as he was victorious in the four matches he played. After he eased past Phil Bowen in three games, he partnered Collier to a mixed doubles win over Williams and Buoey 3-2 (8-11, 6-11, 11-6, 11-5, 11-6) and then partnered Phil Biggs to a men's doubles win over Williams and Barry Elliott 3-1 (11-5, 11-9, 9-11, 14-12).

The penultimate set of the match saw Johns defeat opposing no 1 Williams 3-2 (11-5, 8-11, 5-11, 11-9, 11-6), which gave Cheshire a 5-4 lead with one game to go.

Collier, also unbeaten for Cheshire, started with a win in the mixed doubles and then beat Buoey 3-1 (11-7, 12-14, 11-3, 11-8). She completed her maximum in the final set when she partnered Mark Evans to a thrilling mixed doubles win over Bowen and Buoey 3-2 (9-11, 11-7, 12-10, 11-13, 11-9) which gave Cheshire their 6-4 victory.

Despite going 2-nil down to Kent, Sussex stormed back to take control and never looked like losing as they eased to a 7-3 victory. No 1 Ritchie Venner led from the front as he recorded victories in all four matches he played.

The final match of the weekend saw Yorkshire and Leicestershire fight out a thrilling draw as Yorkshire's top dog Chris Clinton led the way with an unbeaten performance after beating Dave Gannon 3-2 (6-11, 11-9, 10-12, 11-6, 11-5) and opposing no 1 Chris Rogers 3-0 (11-6, 15-13, 11-9).

Yorkshire were 5-3 down prior to the clash of the number ones but Clinton's win brought the teams to within a single set.

In the final mixed doubles Clinton partnered Janet Adams to a five game victory against Gannon and Smith 3-2 (11-8, 4-11, 11-7, 6-11, 11-9) to earn a well-deserved draw for their county.

There were also important wins by Richard Lightowler and Simon Pugh who each chipped in with one singles win apiece as Yorkshire lead the table by one point with the action moving on to Draycott in February when the division is completed.

Please note these results still have to be verified by the ETTA.

Barry Snowden

County Championship Press Officer

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